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REFLECTIONS

Concerning the Imitation of the

GRECIAN ARTISTS

IN

Painting and Sculpture.

In a Series of Letters.

By the Abbe WINKELMAN, N. J. 5. 5.

Principal Librarian to his PRUSSIAN Majesty. R

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REFLECTIONS

CONCERNING THE

Painting and Sculpture

OF THE

ANCIENT GREEKS.

LETTER I.

TRUE taste may be said to have had its rise in Greece, and to have arrived there also to its highest perfection. The inventions of other nations, when communicated

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to the Greeks, were no more than rude essays, that acquired, under the auspicious influence of Grecian genius, a new form, and new accessions of beauty, grace, or utility. Minerva, it is said, chose for the residence of her favourite people that agreeable climate, as the most adapted to favour the progress of wit and genius, on account of that mild and happy temperature that reigns there in the different seasons.

The exquisite taste, that appears in the productions of the Grecian artists, has been in a great measure peculiar to them.

It has rarely been transmitted to other nations without losing something of its native excellence; and its pleasing light made its way but late into the northern regions. It is not so very long ago, that several capital pictures of Corregio were employed at Stockholm to stop the broken windows of the royal stables.

The imitation of the ancients is the only way of excelling in the sublime and elegant arts of Painting and Sculpture; and we may say of their productions, what has been said of Homer, that the more we study

them, the more we must admire them, as true beauty appears most to advantage when it is strictly examined. In order to admire the Laocoon as we admire Homer, a man must have such an acquaintance with that famous statue, as he has with an intimate friend with whom he daily converses. Nicomachus passed an hour or two every day with the Helen of Zeuxis, and on hearing a person find fault with the composition of that famous picture, "Take my eyes," said he, "and you will think her a goddess."

It was with such eyes, that Michael Angelo, Raphael and Pouffin, beheld the productions of the ancient artists. They looked for taste, truth, and beauty, at the fountain-head. Raphael sent several excellent designers into Greece to draw for him all the precious remains of antiquity that has escaped the waste of time.

It must not, however, be imagined, that the most capital productions of the famous painters and sculptors of ancient times are free from defects. These defects are even more numerous than is gene-

rally apprehended; though they are, as it were, lost in a blaze of beauties, and scarcely attended to amidst those sentiments of admiration that the masterly part of each production excites. Some of the greatest painters and sculptors of antiquity confined their efforts to the principal figure of each piece, and often neglected the rest. Who would imagine that the *Dolphin* and the *Cupid* that are seen at the feet of the *Venus de Medicis*, were the work of the same chisel that gave perfect grace and perfect beauty to that immortal form? Look at the greatest part of the medals

of the kings of Egypt and Syria, nay at those where the workmanship is most exquisite, and you will perceive the heads highly finished, and the other parts of the medal much inferior in beauty and grace. We must consider the productions of some of the greatest artists of antiquity as Lucian did the *Jupiter* of Phidias: he admired the god, without looking at his footstool.

It has been given as a rule necessary to the perfection of painting, that imitation must follow, not merely nature, but nature in its most striking and

perfect appearances, in its most grand or agreeable forms, in a word, *select nature*, if I may use that expression. But those who are capable of judging of the productions of the Grecian artists, and who endeavour to imitate them, will find not only this *select nature* in them, but something still more transcendent and sublime; they will find, in them, that *ideal beauty*, of which the model is not visible in external nature, and which, as an ancient commentator of Plato tells us, is only to be found in the human mind, where it was originally plant-

ed by the primitive source of eternal beauty.

The most beautiful and best proportioned human form that is to be found in modern times, would perhaps resemble the most beautiful body among the Greeks, no more than Iphicles resembled his brother Hercules. The gentle temperature of a pure, mild, and serene atmosphere, had, no doubt, a certain influence on the bodily constitution of the ancient Grecians; and the manly exercises to which their youth were accustomed, brought to perfection what nature had thus hap-

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pily begun. Let us take a young Lacedemonian, sprung from the blood of heroes, whose infant motions were never restrained by those miserable shackles that cramp nature in our hapless children, who from the age of seven years has lain upon the ground, from his earliest youth has been trained up to hardships, and whose very amusements, such as wrestling, swimming, &c. have contributed to brace his nerves, to invigorate his frame, and to give force and energy to all his motions; let us take, I say, this masculine figure, and place him, in imaginati-

on, beside a modern beau, a *Sybarite* of our days, and then ask an able artist, which of the two he will chuse for his model in drawing a *Theseus*, an *Achilles*, or even a *Bacchus*? A Grecian painter perceiving one day two statues of the first of these heroes, of which the one had an effeminate, and the other a manly aspect, said pleasantly, "This *Theseus* has been fed with roses, but the other has been nourished with flesh." The application of this saying is easy and evident.

The Grecian games were a perpetual incentive to the

youth to apply themselves to bodily exercises, and the laws obliged those of the youth who proposed to contend for the prize, to prepare themselves for this famous contest during the space of ten months at Peloponnesus; where the games were to be celebrated. The principal prizes were not always gained by those who had attained to the age of manhood, but often by those who were in the prime of youth, as we see by the Odes of Pindar.

See the swift and active Indian, who pursues the stag in

chace! With what freedom and velocity do the animal spirits flow in his elastic and well strung nerves! how flexible are his muscles! how nimble his motions! how vigorous his frame! The ordinary characteristic of Homer's hero is swiftness of foot, and agility in the course.

It was in these exercises that the body acquired that masculine and noble *contour* which the Grecian artists gave their statues, and which had nothing in it either unmeaning or superfluous. The young Spartans were obliged, every

ten days, to appear stark naked, in presence of the Ephori, who prescribed them a strict and severe diet, when they discovered in them the least tendency to corpulence or fatness, which are equally inconsistent with bodily proportion and vigour. There is still extant a law of Pythagoras to the same purpose; and this is, undoubtedly, the reason that engaged the young Greeks of the earliest ages to make use of a milk-diet, during the whole time that they were preparing themselves for disputing the prize at the public games.

The Grecians avoided, with the utmost care, every thing that could have the most remote tendency either to distort the features of the face, or to destroy the proportions of the body. Alcibiades refused to learn to play on the flute, because it forced him to make wry mouths; and in this his example was followed by all the young Athenians.

The Grecian dress was also such as left Nature in its free course in forming the body to its just proportions. Its natural and regular growth was neither restrained nor modifi-

ed by those unwieldy and uneasy garments, that disfigure our necks, thighs, and haunches. Those modern contrivances, that a false modesty has invented to disguise real beauty, were unknown to the Grecian ladies.

Every one also knows the care that was employed by the Grecians to render their offspring beautiful, and the encouragements that the government administered to animate them in this laudable design. They carried this amiable art so far, as to attempt changing the colour of the eyes. There

were public prizes proposed at Peloponnesus, as the crown of beauty; and those, who were victorious in this singular contest, were rewarded with a suit of armour, that was afterwards hung up, to their honour, in the temple of Minerva. There were always competent judges to decide contests of this nature. Aristotle tells us, that the Greeks taught their children the art of drawing, with a view to enable them to judge, with discernment and taste, of those bodily proportions that constitute true beauty.

At this very day, the Grecian isles are remarkable for the gracefulness and beauty of their inhabitants; and the female sex there retain still, notwithstanding their intermarriages with foreigners, such peculiar charms of complexion and figure, as exhibit a strong argument in favour of the transcendent beauty of their ancestors, whom, in their whimsical chronology, they look upon as more ancient than the moon. The charms of beauty are so universal among the Georgians and Kaddardinskians, a branch of the Tartars, that a fine complexion

and a comely figure are no rareties in those countries.

Those fatal disorders that destroy a regular set of features, a fresh complexion, and a well-proportioned form, were unknown among the Greeks: no trace of the small pox, the venereal disease, or rickets, is to be found either in the authors or the tradition of that people.

In a word, whatever art can contribute to promote the health, beauty, fymmetry, and perfection, of the human body, from the state of infancy

to that of manhood, was employed by the Grecians for that purpose, and rendered them the models of imitation to those who sought nature in its fairest and most graceful forms.

But it is now time to consider the influence of these facts on the progress of the sublime and elegant arts of painting and sculpture. This shall be the subject of some following letters.

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LETTER II.

I MENTIONED, in my last, the uncommon beauty of figure, complexion, and bodily proportion, among the Greeks, as a circumstance favourable to the imitative arts of Painting and Sculpture, and peculiarly adapted to render them interesting; but I must now observe, that in the noble and virtuous freedom of the Grecian manners, there were a variety of circumstances that rendered these models of beauty peculiarly adapted to these arts. Had the Grecians adopt-

ed the manners of the Egyptians, those pretended inventors of the arts and sciences, who, by the most austere laws, cramped and restrained nature in many of her operations, these models of beauty would not have produced the effects now under consideration, and *elect* or *beautiful Nature* would have been but very imperfectly discovered to the curious artist. But among this charming people, whose lives were devoted to elegant pleasure, and whose manners were not restrained by certain demands of decency that are of modern origin, and owe their rise per-

haps to our corruption, nature appeared without a veil, and disclosed all the variety of her graceful beauty.

The Painters and Sculptors studied their respective arts in those *gymnasia*, or public places, where the youth, who needed no other veil than public chastity, and purity of manners, performed quite naked their various exercises. These places were frequented both by philosophers and artists. SOCRATES came hither to instruct Charmides, Antolychus, or Lysis; and it was here also that PHIDIAS came to contemplate

these living, active, and animated models, the beautiful, graceful and sublime. In these public exercises, all the different motions of the muscles, and an amazing variety of postures and attitudes, were exhibited to the view of the attentive observer; and the *contours* of a vigorous and beautiful body were sometime visible in the impressions which the young wrestlers made upon the sand of the *Arena*.

You may easily imagine, that the nudities appeared in an infinite variety of situations and aspects in these exercises;

whose dignity, truth, grace, and expression, can never be bound in those mercenary models, that sell their ignoble nakedness to the painters in our modern academies.

The *Soul* alone can imprint upon the body the character and expression of truth; an attitude that is not formed by *feeling* is a falshood, it is a counterfeit. A Painter, who is desirous of expressing in his designs this character of *Truth*, can never succeed, if he has not, before his eyes, attitudes animated by sentiment, or does not supply this by the powers

of a lively and well-directed imagination.

The flower of the youth danced naked at Athens on the public theatre. It was the great Sophocles that gave the first example of this singular spectacle to his fellow-citizens, in his youthful days. At the feasts celebrated by the Eleusinians in honour of Ceres, Phryne, the beautiful Phryne, appeared bathing to the eyes of all Greece; and when she came out of the bath, she probably gave the sculptors the model of the *sea-born Venus*. You know also, that, at Sparta, the

young damfels danced naked, on a certain day, in prefence of all the Spartan youth. This is not fo furprifing, when we confider, that in the primitive ages of the Chriftian church, perfons of both fexes were baptized indifcriminately by immerfion in the fame water.

From all this it appears, not only that Greece furnifhed the nobleft and moft graceful models for perfecting the arts now under confideration, but that the Painters and Sculptors had, from the turn of the Grecian manners, and the nature of their public institutions, the

best possible opportunities of deriving from these models all the instruction they were adapted to administer. These opportunities returned constantly with their shews, games, and festivals, which were very numerous.

Hitherto, indeed, I have only considered the advantages the Grecian artists enjoyed with respect to the *graceful*, the *beautiful*, and the *noble*, of which the public spectacles presented them with perpetual models. The objects that excite *sorrow* and *terror* are, however, essentially comprehended in

the imitative arts, and the *terrible* and the *moving* are necessary branches of the *sublime* in painting. The Greeks, while they remained free, were too humane to admit scenes of blood or spectacles of horror on their theatres. Some allege, indeed, that spectacles of this kind were not entirely unknown in Ionia: it is, however, certain, that if they were really introduced into that province, they were but a very short time in vogue. Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, was the first who introduced these scenes of horror into Greece. He sent to Rome

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for gladiators. Those unhappy victims of the barbarity of a fierce populace were, at first, extremely displeasing to the Greeks, who beheld them with horror: but this sensibility gradually diminished; custom rendered these inhuman scenes familiar; and thus they exhibited a new set of objects to exercise the pencil and the chisel of the Grecian artist, a new set of models, and a new source of instruction. It was here that Ctesilas found the model of his *dying gladiator*, mentioned with the highest approbation by Pliny, as a most astonishing masterpiece

in point of expression. This author tells us, that in the face, nay in all the principal members, of this famous statue, an attentive observer might remark the degree of life and motion that was yet supposed to remain.

These multiplied occasions of observing nature in all her motion, and in all her various aspects, not only rendered the Grecian artists capable of representing her various beauties with energy and truth, but also encouraged them to go yet farther than real nature, and to make a new step to-

wards perfection, under the guidance of those very principles which Nature had furnished them with. After contemplating nature in her fairest forms, they imagined forms yet more fair and striking: they thus acquired *ideas* of beauty superior to those Nature herself had exhibited; and these they applied to the particular parts of the human body in their noble productions, and also to the whole taken in one point of view. This *ideal beauty* had no existence but in their elevated conceptions; it was not derived from any external object, but it far surpassed any

thing which had hitherto passed for beauty in the esteem of mankind.

It was after this *ideal* form of beauty that RAPHAEL drew his famous *Galatia*. This immortal artist, in his letter to count Balthazar Castiglione, observes, that the different branches of true beauty are rarely united in one person, particularly in those of the fair sex; and that, of consequence, he judged proper to give his *Galatia* the sublime lines of an *ideal beauty*, and to work after a model which existed nowhere but in his own imagination.

These *ideas*, which are really superior to all the forms that *matter* assumes in the ordinary course of things, guided the Grecian artists in their representations both of Gods and Men. In the statues of the Gods and Goddesses, the forehead and the nose were almost entirely comprehended in the same line. We find a profile of the same nature in the heads of the celebrated women of ancient times, that are represented in the Grecian medals, though it was by no means a matter of indifference here, to follow or depart from this ideal plan. It is possible, that

this conformation may have been peculiar to the ancient Greeks, as flat noses are to the Calmucs and some other nations, and little eyes to the Chinese. The large, full eyes, that we always find in the Grecian heads in the ancient gems and medals, seem to form a strong presumptive argument in favour of this opinion. Be that as it may, the Grecian artists drew the heads of the Roman Empreſſes after the *ideal* model also; and thus we find the style and manner that reign in the profile of a *Livia*, and an *Agrippina*, to be much the same with those that are ob-

fervable in that of an *Artemisia*,
or a *Cleopatra*.

You must not, however, imagine, that this pursuit of an ideal beauty, of a model more perfect than any which exists in reality, diverted the Grecian artists from the imitation of nature, or carried them astray into the chimerical wilds of mere undirected fancy. This was by no means the case, as I purpose to shew in a following letter.

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L E T T E R I I I

I MENTIONED largely, in my last, the sublime lines of beauty, the graceful touches that the Grecian artists derived from the ideal world. You must not, however, imagine, that by entering into this airy region they wandered from nature and truth ; for this was by no means the case. Though they made several excursions into the ideal world, yet nature was their home, and they never lost sight of it. The great rule which the Thebans prescribed to their artists, *viz*,

“To imitate nature as far as was possible,” was carefully observed by the Grecians in general. As often as they perceived, that they could not execute their fine profile without departing from the truth, they followed nature in preference to idea; as may be seen in the beautiful head of *Julia* the daughter of Titus.

To imitate faithfully their model, and at the same time to embellish it, and thus to unite truth and beauty, was the grand principle of the Grecian artists, and the fundamental rule they followed in

their productions. But is it not evident, that the observation of this rule supposes in a Painter or a Statuary an idea of perfection beyond what nature actually exhibits? Polygnotes is famous in the history of arts, for his constant adherence to this leading principle.

We are indeed told, that Cratina, the mistress of Praxiteles, furnished that celebrated artist the idea or model of his Cnidian Venus; and that another famous Painter used the figure of Lais, as a model for the representation of one of the three Graces. But there is nothing

in all this, inconsistent with the general rules already mentioned. The painter or sculptor found in the model he had before his eyes (were it a Cratina or a Lais) particular features and lines of beauty ; but he drew from his ideal model, the master-strokes of elegance and expression, the beautiful arrangement and composition of these parts, which he had taken from actual nature. What was human in his picture or statue, he derived from the first of these models ; what was divine proceeded from the second.

Those whom a superior taste,

aided by reflection and study, initiated in the mysteries of the fine arts, will perceive, in the productions of the Grecian artists, beauties that are very little known, and that escape the penetration of a common observer. And these beauties will still appear more striking to them, when they compare the productions of the ancient with those of modern artists; more especially of such as follow nature timorously and servilely, without invention and freedom.

In the carnations of the greatest part of the moderns,

the skin is represented by a multitude of small folds, that are too apparent, and are expressed with a certain degree of harshness: the Greek artists represented, on the contrary, these folds by easy and flowing curves, or *waving lines*, which arose out of each other by an imperceptible transition, formed a *whole*, and seemed to be produced by one stroke of the pencil or chissel. In these master-pieces of antiquity, the skin, instead of exhibiting an air of constraint, and appearing to be drawn by effort over the flesh, seemed on the contrary blended with it, follow-

ed exactly all its contours, and had none of those detached folds, which make it look like a substance separate from the body it covers.

I might mention several other circumstances, which distinguish the productions of the ancients from the works of modern artists; circumstances which were probably derived from the superior beauty of the models they had to work after, as has been already observed in one of my former letters; the glow of health and vigour that the constitution of the Greeks derived from the

benign influences of a pure air, and a mild and temperate climate; and from the public exercises, contributing, no doubt, to furnish the Painter and the Statuary with the most graceful and excellent objects of imitation.

These considerations are so much the more worthy of the attention of artists and connoisseurs in our times, that there are many persons who have taken it into their heads to look upon the admiration of the remains of *Grecian antiquity*, as the effect of prejudice or whim, and to imagine that

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these remains have nothing but their antiquity to recommend them. The famous Bernini, though neither his taste nor his extensive knowledge would allow him to embrace this strange opinion in all its extent, was nevertheless far from being zealous in recommending, as a principle and essential rule, the study and imitation of the ancient artists. His notion, or rather his leading maxim, was this, " That NATURE had given to all its productions the degrees of beauty that belong to each, and that it was the province of ART to find these beauties out, and

to combine and express them with elegance and truth." He was also, as is well known, one of those who would not acknowledge the superiority of the Greeks in the imitation of *select* or *beautiful Nature*, and in the expression and the use of *ideal beauty*. He acknowledged, indeed, that the transcendent beauty of the *Venus de Medicis* had, for a long time, prejudiced him in favour of the Greeks, and made him entertain a very high notion of their superiority to all other models; but he boasts of his having triumphed over this prejudice, in consequence of

long observation and study; which shewed him, that all the beauties of this famous statue were to be found *actually existing* in nature.

Let us examine a little this confession, since it is very remarkable, furnishes an argument against the famous artist that made it, and represents, in the strongest light, the excellence of the Grecian productions, and their claim to a place among the most perfect models. Bernini acknowledges, that the *Venus de Medicis* pointed out to him beauties in Nature which he had not

before discovered, and which, without this guide, he would never have sought after, as this statue alone could make him imagine their *real existence* possible. What then is the conclusion deducible from this declaration? It is evidently this, that the fairest lines of beauty are much more easily to be discovered in the Grecian statues, than in Nature itself; and that they are less dispersed, and make a more striking and powerful impression, by their re-union in these sublime copies, than when they are scattered far and wide in the original. Allowing, there-

for, the study of Nature the high degree of merit it so justly claims, it must nevertheless be granted, that it leads to true beauty by a much more tedious, laborious, and difficult path, than the study of the *antique*, which presents immediately to the artist's view the object of his researches, and combines in a clear and strong point of light the various rays of beauty that are dispersed through the wide domain of Nature. When, therefor, Bernini exhorted constantly the young artists to study *select* or *beautiful Nature*, he gave them

undoubtedly good advice ; but did not place them in the shortest road to perfection.

There are two ways of imitating Nature. In the one single object occupies the artist who endeavours to represent it with precision and truth ; in the other, certain lines and features are taken from a variety of objects, and combined and blended into one regular *whole*. Portraits and all kinds of copies belong to the first kind of imitation ; and productions of this kind must be executed necessarily in the Dutch manner, that is to say, with

high finishing, and little or no invention. But the second kind of imitation leads directly to the investigation and discovery of true beauty, of that beauty whose idea is *con-*
nate with the human mind, and is only to be found there in its highest perfection. This is the kind of imitation in which the Greeks excelled, and in which men of genius excite the young artists to excel after their example, *viz.* by studying Nature as they did. But these men of genius do not consider, that the Greeks had, in this study, many advantages of which we are deprived:

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Nature carried to them a fairer and more beautiful aspect, than she does to us; they had innumerable occasions to contemplate and observe her, of which we are deprived; they had models, which are but rarely to be found in our days. It would be extremely difficult to find, in modern times, a human body, as perfect, in proportion, beauty, and grace, as the statue of *Antinous*. Where shall we find any thing so sublime, as the more than human proportions of the *Apollo* in the Vatican? The utmost powers of nature and art are exhausted in these marvellous productions.

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L E T T E R I V .

THE observations, contained in my former letters, seem to prove, with sufficient evidence, that the *imitation of the Ancients* is the shortest way to perfection in the fine arts: first, because we have few opportunities of observing Nature in her most graceful, elegant, and sublime aspects; and secondly, because we see the beauties, that are scattered far and wide through the extensive domain of Nature, gathered together, and drawn within a narrow compass, in their mas-

terly productions; and perceive, at the same time, how a bold genius, directing, however, a prudent hand, may embellish Nature, and raise her, if I may be allowed the expression, above herself. An artist will be taught, by this imitation, to think nobly, and to execute without anxiety or diffidence; as he will find, in the works of the ancients, the limits marked out with perspicuity and precision which separate *actual* from *ideal* beauty.

As soon as the artist has laid this excellent foundation, ac-

quired an intimate degree of familiarity with the beauties of the Grecian statues, and formed his taste after the admirable models they exhibit, he may then proceed with advantage and assurance to the imitation of Nature. The ideas he has already formed of the perfection of Nature, by observing her dispersed beauties combined and collected in the compositions of the ancient artists, will enable him to acquire with facility, and to employ with advantage, the *detached* and *partial* ideas of beauty which will be exhibited to his view in a survey of

Nature in her actual state. When he discovers these partial beauties, he will be capable of combining them with those perfect forms of beauty, with which he is already acquainted. In a word, by having always present to his mind the noble models already mentioned, he will be, in some measure, his own oracle, and will draw rules from his own mind.

A painter, thus formed, may, with the utmost freedom, apply himself to the imitation of Nature. Michael Angelo used to say, that the artist will ne-

ver excel who follows with a servile precision his masters or models; and that it is impossible to employ with facility and to advantage the ideas or compositions of other artists, if we do not partake of their capacity and genius, and are, not a great measure at least, endowed with their talents.

Here those on whose happy birth the arts have smiled, and whom Nature has favoured with that divine touch called *Genius*, have a noble field opened before them, and by a generous use of the models I have been recommending,

may hope to become originals themselves, and to exhibit in their turn models to others. Thus De Piles tells us, that Raphael, when he was carried off by death in the flower of his days, "had quit the Marble, and applied himself entirely to the imitation of Nature." This phrase is perfectly explained by the observations which precede. We can never sufficiently regret the untimely death of that immortal artist, whose productions, after this alteration of his method, would have shewn the grand effect of an imitation of Nature, directed by a previous

acquaintance with the sublime productions of Grecian genius. In imitating Nature in its plainest forms, he would still have retained the sublime taste he had acquired by the study of the ancient artists. His pictures might indeed have exhibited, in consequence of his new method, a greater variety, a greater perfection of drapery and colouring, more striking effects of light and shade; but the great merit of his productions would still have been the noble *contour*, and the singular power of expression he borrowed from the models of Grecian antiquity.

To decide the question now under consideration, and to prove evidently that the imitation of the ancient artists is attended with advantages superior to those which arise from the mere imitation of Nature, it would be sufficient to employ two young painters of eminent and equal talents, the one in the observation of Nature, the other in the study of the productions of the Ancients. The former would represent Nature with *truth*; but he would represent her promiscuously in her homely and in her pleasing forms: he might rise to the merit of Caravaggio,

Jordans, or Stella: but the latter would represent Nature in the noblest aspects of which she is susceptible, in the sublime points of view which she assumed under the pencil of the divine Raphael.

Let us suppose for a moment that an artist could derive from Nature all the materials that can enter into a perfect picture; yet it must still be acknowledged, that Nature alone will never teach him that graceful and regular *contour* that constitutes the true line of beauty, and that is only to be learned from the Grecian models.

Many modern artists have used their utmost efforts to imitate the Grecian *contour*, and scarcely any one may be said to have succeeded in this attempt. Even the celebrated Rubens is known to have failed here; and it is remarkable, that the pictures he drew before his arrival in Italy, where he applied himself to the study of the *antique*, are the most defective in this point.

The line, in nature, which separates *plenitude* from *superfluity* is extremely nice, and the greatest modern masters have run into the extremes that lie

on each side of this happy *touch*, which it is, undoubtedly, difficult to hit off with precision. Sometimes, to avoid penury and avidity in their *contours*, they have, by an injudicious exaggeration, rendered them massive and clumsy; and, at other times, to avoid this exaggeration, they have fallen into the opposite defect.

Michael Angelo is perhaps the only artist who may be said with truth to have equalled the ancients; but this high encomium is only due to him in those of his productions which contain strong, robust,

and masculine figures, in which the nerves are vigorously braced, and the motion of the muscles is boldly expressed. The tender bloom of youth is less happily represented by this famous artist; and it is well known, that the fair sex derived from his pencil rather the aspect of *Amazons* than of *Graces*.

The Grecians never lost sight of this important point, which they considered as an essential circumstance of their art. They observed it scrupulously in the figures they clothed, as well as in their nudities.

The drapery of their statues seems transparent, and the beautiful *contour* of the body is discernible even under the marble, as if it were in reality a pellucid gauze.

The *Agrippina*, and the *Three Vestals*, that are in the cabinet of *Antiques* at Dreiden, deserve a place among the most exquisite models. It is highly probable, that this Agrippina was not the mother of Nero, but the wife of Germanicus, as it resembles, in a striking manner, a statue of this elder Agrippina, which is still to be seen in the saloon that leads

to the library of St Mark at Venice. The Agrippina of Dresden is a figure larger than nature, represented sitting, with her head reclining, and supported by her right hand. Her beautiful countenance bears the most emphatic expression of a soul sunk in the most profound thought, and rendered, by its deep sorrow, insensible and inattentive to all external objects and impressions. It was probably the intention of the artist to represent this heroine in the moment when she received the afflicting news of her banishment to the island of Pandataria.

The *Three Vestals* deserve a singular degree of attention on account of the noble *manner* that reigns in their drapery, in which circumstance they equal the *Flora* in the Farnese palace, and claim a rank among the most capital productions of the Grecian artists. The heads of these figures are unveiled; from whence we are not to conclude, that they do not represent Vestals, since there are several statues of those virgins where no veil is observable. These three statues may be considered as the first fruits of the important discoveries made at Herculaneum.

They were carried into Germany, before the fate of that city was known by any other circumstance than the letter of Pliny the younger, who has given an account of the death of his uncle, who perished by the same fatal catastrophe that sunk it in the bowels of the earth.

They were discovered at Portici in the neighbourhood of Naples, in the year 1706, by labourers, who were clearing the foundations of a country-house for the Prince of Elbeuf, and were sent to Vienna, where they became the property of

Prince Eugene, who built a magnificent saloon for their reception. They were afterwards purchased by the Elector of Saxony, and are still the principal ornaments of the cabinet of Dresden.

The clothing of these statues is inexpressibly graceful. The small folds arise, by the gentle gradation of an imperceptible curve, from the grand and bold parts of the drapery, and are again dissolved in *these* parts with a noble liberty, without violating the harmony of the composition, or concealing the beautiful *contour*

of the body, which appears through this elegant covering, in all its perfection.

It is, however, necessary to do justice to several modern painters, by observing, that if they have deviated from the Grecian manner of clothing their figures, they have not in this violated the rules of truth and beauty. The Grecian artists took, for their models, garments extremely thin, which they applied wet to the body, so that its *contour* appeared thro' this transparent covering in a striking manner. The necks and breasts of the fair Greeks

disclosed their charms through a light veil termed *peplon*, and the remainder of their dress was in the same taste. In later ages the mode of dress was quite changed, and during a long space of time, tended towards the opposite extreme. This circumstance obliged modern artists to deviate from the Grecian manner, to accumulate the ornaments of dress, and even to employ heavy draperies, whose folds were necessarily less easy and gentle than those of the ancient. This gave rise to a *new manner*, even to those bold and majestic draperies, that do not less disco-

ver the genius and talents of an artist than those of the ancients.

Carlo Maratti and Solimene carried this latter kind of draperies to the highest degree of perfection; but the new Venetian school, which attempted a farther improvement of them, fell into a stiff and disagreeable *manner*, and *exaggerated* only, where they meant to *improve*.

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Painting and Sculpture.

In a Series of Letters.

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L E T T E R V

AMONG the striking marks of excellence and perfection that distinguish the productions of the Grecian artists, there is one that deserves particular notice, as it is observable in all their capital performances, and is very rarely to be found else-where; I mean, a *noble simplicity*, and 'a *sedate grandeur*, in their attitudes and expression. As the bottom of the ocean remains calm and unmoved, however violent the tempests may be that trouble its surface; in the same man-

ner, the expression, that reigns in the Grecian statues, discovers a certain grandeur and tranquillity of soul under the most terrible agitations and the most violent passions.

The sublime mark of a great soul shines forth, in all its beauty, thro' those affecting expressions of pain and anguish that appear in the countenance of the famous *Laocoon*, and diffuse their horrors through his convulsed members. The bitterness of his torment seems to be imprinted on each muscle, and to swell every nerve; and it is expressed with pecu-

liar energy, by the contraction of the *abdomen*, and all the lower parts of his body: this expression is so lively, that the attentive spectator partakes, in some measure, of the anguish it represents: and yet, notwithstanding all this, there is nothing, either in the attitude or countenance of this wonderful statue, that bears the most distant resemblance of distraction or despair; there is not the least appearance of that hideous cry which Virgil makes him send forth on this dreadful occasion: the conformation of the mouth, from the smallness of the opening,

is incompatible with such a cry; it indicates rather a sigh, extorted by great anguish, and half suppressed. The sufferings of the body and the elevation of the soul are expressed in every member with equal energy, and form the most sublime contrast imaginable. Laocoon suffers it; but he suffers like the Philoctetes of Sophocles; his lamentable situation pierces the heart, but fills us, at the same time, with an ambitious desire of being able to imitate his constancy and magnanimity in the pains and sufferings that may fall to our lot.

The expression of such a noble and elevated mind surpasses infinitely the imitation of what is called *beautiful* or *select* Nature. In order to give the breathing marble such a *character* of grandeur, the artist must possess *it* in his own mind, and must draw it from thence. Greece was so happy as to exhibit often the *Artist* and the *Sage* in the same person; and Metrodorus is not the only example that might be brought to prove this desirable union. *Philosophy* lent an assisting hand to the *fine arts*, and animated their productions with efforts of sentiment beyond the com-

mon feelings of humanity, and breathed into them a soul of a superior nature to that which is observed in ordinary mortals.

It may be alleged, that the artist ought to have covered his *Laocoon* with a drapery, as this circumstance would have been suitable to his character as a priest. But the observation of this strict propriety would have concealed a multitude of beauties, and rendered the expression of his torment less striking. Bernini tells us, that on a close examination of this famous statue, he observed, in the stiffness of

the thigh, the effect which the poison of the serpent was beginning to produce.

All the attitudes and motions of the Grecian figures, whose violence, fire, and impetuosity, were incompatible with that sedate grandeur of which I have now been speaking, were looked upon as defective; and this defect was called *parenthyrsis*.

The more calm that we suppose the state of the body, the more adapted it must naturally be to express the true character of the soul. On the contrary, all the attitudes, that de-

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viate *too far* from this state of serenity and repose, represent a soul, whose situation, instead of being natural, is forced, violent, and constrained. It is true, the soul is expressed, in a more striking and lively manner, when it is represented under the agitations of strong and impetuous passions; but it never appears with such grandeur and dignity as when it is calm and serene. True grandeur must have a certain degree of permanence and consistence, that is not to be found in the transitory emotions of violent passions; and a great artist, as well as a judicious

observer, will be careful to distinguish between *passion* and *character*. If the *Laocoon* had expressed nothing more than pain and anguish, the artist would have been chargeable with the *parenthyrsis*, already mentioned; to avoid this defect, and to represent the firmness and constancy of soul that distinguish this dying hero, without weakening the expression of his anguish, the judicious statuary chose that peculiar attitude and posture which was the nearest to a state of repose of any that could belong to the unhappy situation of this magnanimous sufferer. But still,

even in the midst of this repose, the soul is characterised by lines that distinguish it in a peculiar manner: though calm, it is active; and its repose bears no resemblance of indifference or insensibility.

The taste and manner of the most eminent modern artists are in direct opposition to this admirable method of proceeding. They are delighted chiefly with extraordinary efforts of sentiment and action, with bold attitudes, and are satisfied with almost no representations that are not full of fire, boldness, and vivacity. The use of *con-*

trast is their favourite *manner*, and this they take to be the very perfection of their art. They would have the soul that animates their figures, to be like a comet, which runs beyond the limits prescribed to the other celestial bodies; and did they follow, without restraint, their ill-directed taste, their statues and pictures would represent, constantly, such subjects as an Ajax or a Capaneus.

The *fine arts*, like the human race, have their period of infancy; and it is highly probable, that in this early period, it happened to painting and

sculpture, as to poetry, that the *marvellous* was received with greater applause, than what was truly *beautiful*, and that exaggerated imitations and astonishing images or representations were sure to succeed. It is from hence, undoubtedly, that we are to deduce the origin of those hyperbolical expressions, that rendered the muse of Eschylus in general, and his *Agamemnon* in particular, still more intricate and obscure than the riddles of Heraclitus; and it is very likely, that the first Grecian painters had as little taste, as the first tragic writers.

All this is conformable to the procedure of human nature. The first actions and motions of humanity are lively, vehement, and impetuous; and it is only by degrees, and in process of time, that the steps they take in life become calm, sedate, and regular, and that they *learn* to approve such a rational method of proceeding. It is only the great masters that excel in this latter kind of representation; the scholars succeed much better in the imitation and expression of violent passions. True connoisseurs know what difficulties accompany this *calm* and

sedate manner, which at first appears so easy,

ut sibi quivis

*Speret idem, sudet multum, frustra que laboret
Ausus idem.*

La Fage, that famous designer, has, notwithstanding his great reputation, remained far below the ancients. In his works all is in motion; it is impossible to behold them without perplexity and confusion; they resemble a company in which every one speaks at one and the same time.

I may venture to assert, that the great lines of that noble simplicity, that sedate and calm

grandeur, that characterise the Grecian statues, are more or less observable in the writings of those eminent geniuses who lived during the golden age of letters in Greece, and more especially in the productions of the disciples of Socrates. But it is more to my present purpose to observe, that these noble characters distinguish peculiarly the genius of Raphael, and constitute that superior degree of merit which raises him so high above all modern artists: and it is well known, that this superiority was entirely owing to the imitation of the ancients. Nature had

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endowed him with that uncommon elevation of mind, that rendered him capable of entering into the spirit of the ancient artists, and relishing the beauties of their immortal productions, at an age in which vulgar souls are rather caught with the false glare of the *marvellous*, than with the pure lustre of what is truly *great* and *sublime*.

The eye must be accustomed to contemplate beauties of this kind, and the taste formed by an acquaintance with the ancients, in order to their perceiving the beauties that

abound in the productions of Raphael. The spectator, thus prepared, will discern the noblest lines of grandeur and energy, even in the *tranquillity* and *repose* that distinguish the principal figures of his *Attila*, and make them appear lifeless to common observers. The Bishop of Rome, who, in that famous picture, engages the King of the Huns to desist from his hostile enterprize, is not represented with the animated gestures and attitudes of an orator: no; he appears under the serene, commanding aspect of a venerable man, whose presence, alone, calms the tem-

pest, and calls to our remembrance the beautiful picture drawn by Virgil:

*Tum pietate GRAVEM ac meritis si forte virum
quem*

Conspexere—silent—et arreclis auribus adstant.

Even under the fierce eye of this Barbarian Prince, the countenance of the Roman prelate expresses that serenity of mind that arises from a full confidence in God. The two apostles, that are represented in the clouds, do not carry the aspect of destroying angels, but, if I may be allowed to make use of a profane image on a subject so sacred, rather resemble the Jupiter of Homer, whose

simple nod makes the towering Olympus tremble on its foundations.

I reflect with pain on the number of beauties that have been lost upon ordinary observers in the famous *St Michael* of Guido Rheni, that is to be seen in the church of the Capuchins at Rome; and I am sorry to remark, that too few, even among those who are called connoisseurs, have been capable of perceiving that sublimity of expression that the noble artist has given to the Archangel in that famous picture. The *St Michael* of Concha is generally preferred before that of

Guido, because the glaring passions of *wrath* and *vengeance* are expressed in his countenance: but how far superior is the grandeur of the latter, who, after having vanquished the great enemy of God and mankind, reascends to heaven with a serene and placid countenance. This resembles the sublime figure of the avenging angel which Mr ADDISON has drawn, with such beauty, in his poem, intitled, *The Campaign*, in these admirable lines:

CALM and SERENE he drives the furious
blast,

And, PLEAS'D th' Almighty's orders to perform,

Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.

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L E T T E R VI

THE style and manner of Raphael appear in a high degree of perfection, in a famous production of that great master, which is still to be seen in the gallery of Dresden, and is justly looked upon as one of his most capital pieces. It contains the following figures: The Virgin Mary with the child Jesus, St Sixtus and St Barbara kneeling on each side of the divine infant, and two Angels in the fore-ground of the picture. This was formerly an altar-piece in a convent at Pla-

centia; and the connoisseurs came thither in crouds to contemplate its beauties, as they resorted, in times of old, to Thespis to admire the famous Cupid of Praxiteles. There is an amazing mixture of mild innocence and celestial majesty expressed in the countenance of the Virgin: the whole of her attitude denotes a sweet *satisfaction*, a boundless *felicity*, that sublime *tranquillity* that gives such dignity to the aspect of the heathen deities in the Grecian statues. It is utterly impossible to conceive any thing more grand, any thing more noble, than the contour of this

admirable figure. The *Infant-Saviour* is characterised by certain rays of divine majesty, that appear blended with that air of infancy which is peculiar to that tender age. The other figures are proportionably beautiful, and the harmony and variety that reigns in the whole composition is astonishing.

It is certain, that length of time has considerably diminished the *effect* of this famous picture, and weakened the force and vivacity of its colouring; but the *soul* and energy which this production receive.

ed from the creating hand of Raphael, renders it, even to this day, animated and affecting.

Those who expect to find, in this master-piece of that immortal artist, or in his other compositions, those minute beauties of circumstantial *finishing* that render the labours of the Dutch painters so precious to some, will be greatly disappointed. They will neither find here the industrious efforts, the indefatigable and laborious care of a Netscher or a Bon, nor the ivory carnations of a Van der Werff, nor

the cold and lifeless manner of some modern Italians.

After having studied in the productions of the Grecian masters, their choice and expression of select nature, their sublime and graceful contours, their noble draperies, together with that sedate grandeur and admirable simplicity that constitute their chief merit, the curious artists will do well to study the manual and mechanical part of their operations, as this is absolutely necessary to the successful imitation of their excellent manner.

It is certain that the ancients, almost always, formed their first models in wax: to this modern artists have substituted clay, or some such composition: they prefer clay before wax in the carnations, on account of the yielding nature of the latter, and its sticking in some measure to every thing it touches.

We must not, however, imagine from hence, that the method of forming models of wet clay was either unknown or neglected among the Greeks. On the contrary, it was in Greece that models of this kind

were invented. Their author was Dibutades of Sycion, and it is well known that Arcefilas the friend of Lucullus, obtained a higher degree of reputation by his *clay models*, than by all his other productions. He composed in clay, for Lucullus, a figure representing *Happiness*, for which he received 60,000 sesterces, (a most magnificent recompence at the smallest estimation of that ancient coin); and he received from Octavius a talent for the model of a cup that was afterwards wrought in gold. Such rewards shew abundantly, that the Roman nobility carried

their love of the fine arts to a very high degree of enthusiasm.

If clay could be made to preserve its original moisture, it would undoubtedly be the fittest substance for the models of the sculptor. But when it is placed either in the fire, or left to dry imperceptibly in the air, its solid parts grow more compact, and the figure losing thus a part of its dimensions, is necessarily reduced to a smaller volume. This diminution, indeed, would be of no consequence, did it equally affect the whole figure, so as to preserve its proportions entire.

But this is not the case: for the smaller parts of the figure dry sooner than the larger; and thus losing more of their dimensions in the same space of time than the latter do, the symmetry and proportions of the figure inevitably suffer.

This inconveniency does not take place in those models that are made in wax. It is, indeed, extremely difficult, in the ordinary method of working the wax, to give it that degree of smoothness that is necessary to represent the softness of the *carnations*, or fleshy parts of the body. This inconvenience

may, however, be remedied, by forming the model first in clay, then molding it in plaster, and lastly casting it in wax.

So much for the first or preparatory steps in this procedure. It remains to consider the manner of working the marble after the model so prepared; and the method here followed by the Greeks seems to have been extremely different from that which is generally observed by modern artists. In the ancient statues we find the most striking proofs of the freedom and boldness that accompanied each stroke

of the chisel, and which resulted from the artist's being perfectly sure of the accuracy of his idea, and the precision and steadiness of his hand: the most minute parts of the figure carry these marks of assurance and freedom; no indication of timorousness or diffidence appear, nothing that can induce us to fancy that the artist had occasion to correct any of his strokes. It is difficult to find, even in the second-rate productions of the Grecian artists, any mark of false stroke or a random touch. This firmness and precision of the Grecian chisel were certainly derived

from a more determined and perfect set of rules than those which are observed in modern times.

The method generally observed by the modern sculptor is as follows. After having studied his model with all possible attention, he draws upon this model horizontal and perpendicular lines which intersect each other at right angles. They afterwards copy these lines upon their marble, as the painter makes use of such transversal lines to copy a picture, or to reduce it to a smaller size.

These transversal lines or squares drawn in an equal number, upon the marble, and upon the model, in a manner proportioned to their respective dimensions, exhibit accurate measures of the *surfaces* upon which the artist is to work; but cannot determine, with equal precision, the *depths* that are proportioned to these surfaces. The sculptor, indeed, may determine these depths by observing the relation they bear to his model; but as his eye is the only guide he has to follow in this estimate, he is always more or less exposed to error, or at least to doubt.

He is never sure that the cavities made by his chisel are exact; a degree of uncertainty accompanies each stroke; nor can he be assured that it has carried away neither too much nor too little of his marble. It is equally difficult to determine, by such lines as have already been mentioned, the *external* and *internal* contours of the figure, or to transfer them from the model to the marble. By the *internal contour* I understand *that* which is described by the parts which approach towards the centre, and which are not marked in a striking manner.

It is farther to be noticed, that in a complicated and laborious work, which an artist cannot execute without assistance, he is often obliged to make use of foreign hands, that have not the talents or dexterity that are necessary to finish his plan. A single stroke of the chisel that goes too deep, is a defect not to be repaired; and such a stroke may easily happen, where the *depths* are so imperfectly determined. Defects of this kind are inevitable, if the sculptor, in chipping his marble, begins by forming the depths that are requisite in the figure he de-

signs to represent. Nothing is more liable to error than this manner of proceeding. The cautious artist ought, on the contrary, to form these depths gradually, by little and little, with the utmost circumspection and care; and the determining them with precision ought to be considered as the last part of his work, and as the finishing touches of his chisel.

The method I have now been considering is attended with another inconvenience: for the lines that are copied from the model on the marble,

are partly effaced by every stroke of the chisel. Thus they must be constantly repaired, or new ones must be substituted in their place; and here mistakes are often to be expected.

The various inconveniencies attending this method, determined several eminent artists to look out for one that would be liable to less uncertainty, and productive of fewer errors. The French academy of painting, at Rome, hit upon a method of copying the ancient statues, which some sculptors have employed with success,

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even in the figures they finished after models in clay or wax. This method is as follows. The statue, that is to be copied, is inclosed in a frame that fits it exactly. The upper part of this frame is divided into a certain number of equal parts, and to each of these parts a thread is fixed with a piece of lead at the end of it. These threads, which hang freely, shew what parts of the statue are most removed from the centre with much more perspicuity and precision than the lines, which are drawn upon its surface, and which pass equally over the higher and

hollow parts of the block: they also give the artist a tolerable rule to measure the more striking variations of height and depth, and thus render him more bold and determined in the execution of his plan.

But even this method is not without its defects: for as it is impossible, by the means of a straight line, to determine with precision the procedure of a curve, the artist has, in this method, no certain rule to guide him in his contours; and as often as the line, which he is to describe, deviates from the direction of the plumb-line,

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which is his main guide, he must necessarily find himself at a loss, and be obliged to have recourse to conjecture.

It is also evident, that this method affords no certain rule to determine exactly the proportion which the various parts of the figure ought to bear to each other, considered in their mutual relation and connections. The artist, indeed, endeavours to supply this defect, by intersecting the plumb-lines by horizontal ones. This recourse has, nevertheless, its inconveniencies; since the squares formed by

transversal lines, that are at a distance from the figure, (tho' they be exactly equal), yet represent the parts of the figure as greater or smaller, according as they are more or less removed from our position or point of view. But notwithstanding these inconveniencies, the method now under consideration, is certainly the best that has hitherto been employed: it is more practicable and sure than any other I know; though it appears, from the remarks I have now been making, that it does not exhibit a sure and *universal* criterion to a sculptor, who executes after a model.

transversal lines, that are at a distance from the figure (the two be exactly equal), yet represent the parts of the figure as if they were parallel, and are not the same as the removed from our position of point of view. But notwithstanding this, the method of projection is certainly the best that has hitherto been employed: it is more practicable and more than any other, though it appears from the remarks I have now been making, that it does not exhibit a true and unvaried criterion to a person, who examines with a

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L E T T E R VII. and last.

IT may be imagined, that the applause, given to the statues of the Grecian artists, is equally due to their paintings: those, at least, who reason merely from analogy, and from the resemblance there is between these sister-arts, will be naturally led to this conclusion. But the wasting hand of time, and the savage fury of conquering Barbarians, have destroyed the precious monuments that might have enabled us to judge with certainty and precision in this nice matter.

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It is generally supposed, that the Grecian painters were perfectly skilled in *drawing*;—the powers of *expression* are also allowed them; but their merit is confined to these two articles. In the arts of *perspective*, *composition*, and *colouring* they are considered as totally deficient. This judgment is partly founded on the *bas-reliefs*, and partly on the ancient pictures, (for it is impossible to prove that they are Grecian productions), that have been discovered, either at Rome, or in its territory, and that have been dug out of the subterraneous ruins of the palaces of

Mecænas, Titus, Trajan, and the Antonines. These pictures are about thirty in number, and some of them are in Mosaic.

Dr George Turnbull, in his *Treatise upon Ancient Painting*, has given a collection of the most noted ancient pictures, of which the drawings were done by Camillo Paderni, and engraven by Van Mynde. This is the most valuable part of that heavy work, which, without these drawings, would not be worth the paper on which it is printed. Among these engravings there are two, of

which the original drawings belonged to the cabinet of the late Dr Mead.

It is well known that Pousson studied, with peculiar assiduity and attention, the *Nozze Aldobrandine*, or marriage-piece, that is still to be seen at Rome in the Villa Aldobrandina; and there are, in some cabinets, drawings of Carrache done after the pretended *Coriolanus* that is the 17th figure in Turnbull's collection: there are also many connoisseurs who find a striking resemblance between the heads of Guido Rheni, and those represented in the *Rape*

of Europa, which is the 8th piece in the same collection. As these remarks are trite and vague, I shall not dwell upon them farther.

It is, however, proper to observe here, that if such pictures as these, *in fresco*, were sufficient to give us a true and accurate idea of the progress and perfection of painting among the ancients, we would be abundantly justified in considering the Grecian painters as very mean proficient, both in the arts of *drawing*, and in the happy talent of *expression*. The walls of the famous thea-

tre at Herculaneum would also confirm us in this notion, as they exhibit few instances of elegant drawing or noble expression, and many examples of the contrary. The *Theseus*, furrounded by young Athenians, who kiss his hands, and embrace his knees, after his victory over the Minotaur, which is so fine a subject for an artist of true genius, is but indifferently drawn; the *Flora* with *Hercules* and the *Fawn*, the supposed *Judgment of Appius Claudius*, are liable to the same censure. The greatest part of the heads in these pieces are destitute of expression; and

those, in the last, are without any distinctive character at all.

But let us not judge rashly from these few remains of antiquity; since their mediocrity seems to prove evidently that they were the productions of some second rate, nay, perhaps, of the lowest class, of painters. For it appears absolutely impossible, that the beautiful proportions, the graceful contour, and the noble expression, that strike us in the works of the Grecian sculptors, should have been unknown to the good painters of that nation.

At the same time I do not pretend to deny, that the modern painters have surpassed the ancient, in several respects. In the article of *perspective* they have a manifest superiority, which has not been contested by the most enthusiastic partisans of the Grecian painters. The rules of *composition*, the art of *grouping* a variety of figures with harmony and freedom, were but imperfectly possessed by the ancients. This appears from the *bas-reliefs* of that period when the Grecian artists flourished at Rome; nor can the singular merit of Echion be alleged as a proof of the

contrary. It must also be acknowledged, that, in point of *colouring*, the moderns excel the ancient artists. This is manifest, not only from the ancient treatises on the theory of painting, but also from the ancient pictures that have survived the ruins of time.

Besides, it must be considered, that there are certain kinds of painting that have acquired, in modern times, a new degree of perfection. Such, among others, is the representation of *landscapes* and *animals*, in which our painters excel, by far, the most eminent artists of anti-

quity. The most beautiful kinds of animals seem to have been little known to the ancient artists, as we may judge by the equestrian statue of *Marcus Antoninus* and the *Two Horses*, on Monte Cavallo at Rome, as also by the *Horses of Lysippus*, which are to be seen above the portal of the church of St Mark at Venice, the *Oxen* in the Farnese palace, and, in general, by all the animals that compose that group. It is worthy of remark, that the ancients, neither in their pictures nor their bas-reliefs, have represented the diagonal position that the legs of a horse in mo-

tion always exhibit. The ancient medals furnish many proofs of this palpable mistake. Some modern artists have, through ignorance, imitated this defect; which certain pretended connoisseurs have injudiciously defended.

The beauty of modern landscape-pieces, more especially those of the Dutch painters, is owing, in a great measure, to the striking effect of oil-colours, which are more lively than the colours employed by the ancients. I cannot, however, help thinking, that this and the other advantages that

the moderns are generally supposed to have had over the ancients, require more solid and satisfactory proofs, and deserve to be placed in a more circumstantial and extensive light, than has hitherto been the case.

To bring the art of painting to its highest perfection, one step more is necessary: but that step is difficult. The artist, who leaves the beaten path of composition, will naturally make this step; and accordingly some enterprising geniuses have attempted it: but the view of the difficulties that at-

tended it, have almost always made them return into the common road. The *Pagan Mythology*, the *Saintly Calendar*, and the *Metamorphoses of Ovid*, have furnished, during many ages, the principal subjects (with a few exceptions, I may say the only ones) that have employed the pencils of our most eminent painters. These subjects have been so often repeated under different modifications, that they are quite exhausted, and are become more or less a surfeit to the wearied connoisseur. *Praying Hermits*, *Martyred Monks*, *Holy Families*, *Crucifixions*, *Europa's Rape*, *Daph-*

ne's Flight, Phaeton's Fall, and such like subjects, drawn from true or false religion, are so thread-bare and common, that some variety is become requisite to renew a palled taste. It is therefor necessary to enlarge the compass of this sublime art, and to make it extend to those objects that do not fall within the province of our external senses. This may appear, at the first sight, an extraordinary attempt, and be even looked upon by many as a romantic one; but it will be found, upon a closer examination, not only that painting may be thus extended, but al-

so, that its highest perfection consists in this method of employing it. That this elegant and sublime art has been so employed, appears evident from several examples on record, which prove that the Grecian painters aimed at this kind of perfection. Parrhasius is said to have drawn, in this manner, the character of a whole people, and to have represented happily in one piece that mixture of benevolence and cruelty, levity and obstinacy, bravery and effeminacy, that distinguished the Athenians. If such a complex representation was possible, it

could only be effected by the succours of *allegory*, by the means of emblems and figures that expressed *universal ideas*.

Here, indeed, the artist, whose ideas are confined to the productions of his contemporaries or predecessors, must find himself in a barren desert. Modern painting furnishes few of those factitious *signs* and *figures* that represent *abstract* qualities and *universal ideas*; such as *humanity*, *fortitude*, *cruelty*, *cowardice*, *effeminacy*, *patriotism*, &c. The language of those savage Indians, who have such a small number of abstract ideas, and

have no terms to express *gratitude, duration, space, &c.* is not more barren in this respect, than the language of painting in its present state. A painter who looks beyond his *paleitte*, and extends his view beyond the narrow sphere by which his art is actually circumscribed, must naturally be desirous of a repertory, where he may find sensible images, that represent, with truth and precision, invisible qualities and objects. There has not indeed appeared hitherto any complete collection of this kind; the attempts that have been made to form such a collecti-

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on have neither been numerous or successful. The well-instructed artist knows what succour is to be derived, here, from the *Iconology* of Ripa, and Vander Hooghes's *Monuments of ancient nations*.

It was undoubtedly this sterility that engaged the most eminent painters to employ all the fire of their genius, and the power of their art, upon common subjects. Hannibal Carrache, instead of representing, in the gallery of the Farnese palace, the noble exploits of the heroes of that illustrious house under allegorical

symbols, confined himself to a trite set of subjects taken from the Pagan Mythology, and exhausted all the resources of his talents in order to render them striking.

The royal gallery of paintings at Dresden contains one of the noblest collections that is to be found in Europe, and consists in capital productions of the greatest masters, chosen with the most exquisite taste, and with the most scrupulous severity; yet how few historical pieces are there in this famous collection! and in these few, how rarely do we meet

with the embellishments of a poetical fancy, or the expressive lines of allegorical representation!

The great Rubens, whose enterprising genius could not be confined within the narrow circle of Heathen fables and Christian legends, lunched out into the sublime region of allegory, and made bolder steps toward this kind of perfection, than the most eminent painters of modern times. The gallery of Luxemburg, the most capital work of this noble artist, (which is generally known by the excellent en-

gravings of the ablest masters) shews the spirit and intrepidity with which he departed from the beaten track, and expatiated in the *avia Pieridum loca*. We have nothing since Rubens, more excellent in this kind, than the cupola of the Imperial library at Vienna, painted by Gran, and engraven by Sedelmayer. The *Deification of Hercules*, painted by Le Moine, at Versailles, and designed as an allegorical representation of the fame and exploits of Cardinal Fleury, is extolled in France beyond all measure, and boasted of as the noblest composition imaginable; but, in

reality, it is no more than a cold and lifeless allegory, when compared with the beautiful and judicious production of the Germain painter already mentioned: it resembles an insipid panegyric, whose most brilliant thoughts consist of allusions to the names of the callendar, or to the signs of the Zodiac. Le Moine had indeed here a field for invention, and a favourable occasion of attempting something great; and it may appear somewhat surprising, that he fell so far below what might have been expected from him in an undertaking of this nature.

But a moment's consideration will remove this surprise; for supposing for once, that the *deification* of a *minister* were a subject worthy of appearing in the principal ceiling of a royal palace, it is, nevertheless, easy to conceive the disadvantages which must attend the artist in such a subject, and the restraint that must damp the efforts of his pencil.

The artists, whose genius leads them to the allegorical species of painting, would require a repertory or work in which all the *sensible* figures and symbols, under which, in

different ages, abstract ideas and qualities have been poetically represented, were carefully collected. The materials of such a collection must be derived from a variety of sources, from mythology, poetry, the occult philosophy, gems, medals, and other monuments of antiquity. A collection of this nature might be divided into various classes, and the artist might draw, from this magazine, representations and symbols, which by an ingenious modification he might happily apply to the subjects he should have occasion to treat. Thus a new path

would be opened to the imitation of the ancients, and the productions of modern artists would discover the noble and elevated taste of antiquity.

Vitruvius complained, that in his time the reigning taste for the ornamental parts of architecture was considerably corrupted, and was become both extravagant and insipid. This bad taste was confirmed and augmented by the *grotesque* manner of painting invented by Morto, and by the capricious groupes and figures with which we adorn our apartments, and which, for the

most part, are mere *bors d'oeuvres*, absolutely destitute of sense and meaning. An assiduous study of allegory would remedy this evil, and be the most effectual means of rendering every ornament expressive and significant: it would enable the artist to suit his decorations to the place he designs to embellish, and to a variety of circumstances relative to both the apartment and the possessor; and would thus render his art singularly entertaining. It is true, great care is requisite to guard against a pedantic stiffness in allusions of this kind; but when affectation

and pedantry are avoided, such allusions form the most agreeable connections. The artist here must resemble the character Horace gives of the poet, who knows

—*Reddere personæ convenientia cuique.*

The paintings that are generally placed above the doors, or that adorn the ceilings, of the great, seem to be designed for no other purpose than to fill a void space, where gilding would be improper; and it is the fear of a *void*, that engages many to cover their walls with pictures and ornaments which are void of sense. Thus this sublime and elegant art is

prostituted to mean and trifling purposes, and is deprived of its chief glory and perfection, even the representation of past and future events, and of those objects, ideas, and qualities, that do not come within the compass of our external senses, and are not expressed by any *natural* signs, but only by symbols, that are intelligible to reason, taste, and judgment.

All the fine arts have a double purpose; they are destined both to *please* and to *instruct*; and this consideration has engaged many eminent artists to introduce *historical* or *moral* re-

presentations even in their landscapes. The pencil of the painter, like the pen of the philosopher, ought to be always directed by reason and good sense. He must present to the understanding and judgment of the spectator, something more than is offered to the external eye; and in this attempt he will succeed perfectly, if he knows the right use of allegory, and is dexterous enough to employ it as a transparent veil, which rather *covers* his thoughts than *conceals* them. Has he chosen a subject susceptible of poetical expression? In such a case, his

art will inspire him, and kin-
dle in his soul the divine flame,
that Prometheus is said once
to have brought by stealth
from the celestial regions.

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